



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 8, 2007

Mr. Chairman.

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador O'Neill to the Permanent Council and to thank him for his comprehensive report on the situation in Moldova. We commend Ambassador O'Neill and his staff for their excellent work on a wide range of difficult issues.

Some positive things have happened in Moldova since Ambassador O'Neill became the Head of Mission. The Moldovan government is carrying out a unilateral and transparent program of disarmament. There is greater transparency and rule of law along the Moldova-Ukraine border, thanks to Ukraine's commitment to implement the bilateral customs protocol and to the help of the EU Border Assistance Mission. A group of OSCE ambassadors was allowed to visit the Colbasna munitions depot last November. And the second round of the Gagauz gubernatorial elections showed significant improvement in terms of fairness over the first round.

Nonetheless, what is most striking about Ambassador O'Neill's report is how much more remains to be done. In the year since the last report to the Permanent Council by the Head of Mission in Moldova, there has been no progress on achieving a settlement to the Transnistria conflict, no participation in the Five-Plus-Two Talks by the Transnistrian side, and no progress on the withdrawal of Russian forces in fulfillment of Russia's Istanbul Commitments. Nor has there been progress on resolving the issue of the school building in Ribnitsa confiscated by the Transnistrian authorities in 2004, nor the Transnistrian militia's seizure of the Bender railway station.

If anything, Ambassador O'Neill's report on the work of his mission since his arrival in Moldova understates the difficulties the OSCE has encountered in Moldova in the last six months. The Permanent Council is rightly focused on the reasons why the Five-Plus-Two talks have not yet resumed. But Ambassador O'Neill's report contains other nuggets that should capture our attention: it is a very serious matter, not merely a source of "disappointment," as raised in the report, that some 40,000 small arms have disappeared from the record, in this region of conflict, without any transparency whatsoever.

Unfortunately, we have been unable to build on one of the positive developments—the OSCE ambassadors' trip to the Colbasna facility—precisely because the Transnistrian authorities have again denied the OSCE Mission access. The trip report recommended the

completion of a detailed inventory of the munitions stored there; we again call on the Transnistrian authorities to allow this to take place.

The United States reiterates that the Transnistrian conflict must be resolved through peaceful negotiations, with respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. We stand ready as an observer in the Five-Plus-Two process to resume those negotiations. We call on the authorities of the Transnistrian region to return to the process, and we again ask that the Russian Federation use its influence with Tiraspol.

Mr. Chairman, over seven years have passed since the Russian Federation committed to the withdrawal of its forces from Moldova at the OSCE Istanbul Summit. We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to fulfill this commitment and resume withdrawing its forces, munitions and equipment, which remain in Moldovan territory without the consent of the host country.

While the peacekeeping contingent played an important role in stopping the fighting in 1992, it now has the effect of maintaining the status quo. The United States looks forward to further discussion of transforming and internationalizing the peacekeeping force in Moldova.

We commend the OSCE Mission for the tremendous work it is doing in the area of combating trafficking in persons. Moldova remains a major source country for trafficked persons, particularly women and girls. The government, with the assistance of the international community, has made some progress in combating this scourge. The United States helps fund the government's Center to Combat Trafficking in Persons, and contributes to the OSCE Mission's projects in this area.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes the formal remarks I had prepared for this session. But having just heard the previous intervention and what came out translated at least from the Russian into English as accusations of irresponsible and unprofessional behavior by our OSCE Mission, I feel compelled to respond to those statements as well. There were accusations that somehow the Mission is not fulfilling the mandate which we, the Permanent Council, have given to that Mission. Our understanding of the mandate given is that the role of the Mission is to facilitate the achievement of a lasting political settlement of the conflict and to assist the parties in consolidating the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova. That is what we all decided upon in 1993. It is not the role of the Mission to facilitate the continuation of the status quo in Moldova. Quite the opposite: it is to propose and provide information which would lead to a lasting political settlement. We believe the Mission has been faithful to that mandate over many years but also continuing up to today. The Mission is tasked to investigate specific incidents in the area, and its staff has reported faithfully to us along those lines. Our Mission has been mandated to encourage the implementation of an agreement of the complete withdrawal of foreign troops, and it has reported faithfully along those lines to us. And after the original mandate was established in 1993, it was amended in 1999 to focus on ensuring transparency of the removal and destruction of Russian ammunition and armaments, and it has done that as well. Finally, the Mission has been tasked by us to initiate a visible OSCE presence in the region. We believe, in fact, that our Mission, including under the leadership of Ambassador O'Neill, has done exactly that.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, we again thank Ambassador O'Neill for his honest, objective and thorough report, and wish him all the best in his tireless efforts to promote peace and reconciliation, and thus a prosperous future, for all Moldovans.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.